

VZCZCXRO0576
PP RUEHTRO
DE RUEHTU #0376/01 1081117
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 171117Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4782
INFO RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA PRIORITY 0039
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 7668
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO PRIORITY 0039
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RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY PRIORITY 0104
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RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 TUNIS 000376

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STATE FOR S/CT (DAILEY AND NELSON); NEA/FO (GRAY)
AF (THOMAS-GREENFIELD); NEA/MAG (HOPKINS, NARDI, AND HARRIS)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/02/2018

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: TRANS SAHARA RSI CONFERENCE: THINK GLOBALLY, ACT
LOCALLY

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (S/NF) During the April 1 Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI) - Trans Sahara conference, Ambassadors and other officials from missions in Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) countries, as well as representatives of the interagency community, discussed the rising terrorist threat in the region. Participants agreed that, since the creation of TSCTP and the RSI, the USG has improved coordination and information sharing across agencies. However, US efforts continue to be limited by human and financial resource constraints as well as varying host country circumstances. Posts need more information about available funding and additional human resources. The USG should also seek to develop a broader public diplomacy campaign and to expand regional and international cooperation. Related long- and short-term action items are listed in para 8. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On April 1 in Tunis, ambassadors and representatives from embassies in TSCTP countries (Algeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Tunisia), as well as Libya, met with interagency officials to discuss the terrorist threat and USG counterterrorism efforts in the region.

What is the Problem? The Threat

¶3. (S/NF) Since the creation of TSCTP, the terrorist threat in the region has grown, particularly since the establishment of al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)(TSCTP

was specifically created to address the rise of extremism in this region and the issue of returning foreign fighters). AQIM, formerly the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), merged with al-Qaeda in September 2006. Since then, AQIM has enhanced its tactics, established transnational terrorist networks, and increased attacks. The organization appears to operate independently, but adopted some al-Qaeda tactics like suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices. The group has also expanded beyond Algeria, identifying recruits in the trans Sahara region and planning attacks in neighboring countries. In the future, AQIM and other terrorists may also seek to exploit regional drug trafficking networks.

14. (S/NF) AQIM and other terrorist groups have exploited local grievances and the spread of extremist ideology in the region. There is no single extremist profile. While socioeconomic frustration was once believed to be a primary cause of terrorism, local and international policy grievances are a growing factor. In North Africa, populations are particularly frustrated by US policies in the Middle East, including vis-a-vis the Palestinians and Iraq. Extremists are also motivated by individual factors, which makes it difficult for the USG to develop appropriate responses. Regional terrorists may be poor or middle class, educated or uneducated, married or single, on-line or isolated. Individual TSCTP countries are therefore sometimes able to identify localized responses that are more successful than region-wide efforts.

What are we Doing About It?

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15. (S/NF) The regionalization of the threat must be addressed in part by regionalizing our own efforts. The planned inclusion of Libya in TSCTP is a positive step in this direction. We should also do more to address host country concerns about counterterrorism (CT) efforts in neighboring countries, such as Algeria's interest in Malian efforts to combat AQIM in northern Mali. Issues and appropriate responses differ in each TSCTP country, and host country CT cooperation and capacity is not uniform. Therefore, missions need to have a menu of options that can be applied easily and quickly in response to local circumstances. For example, our public diplomacy efforts need regional and local components, addressing common criticism and frustrations as well as individual concerns. When we do have success, such as our counter-terrorist financing efforts' impact on AQIM financing, we should also identify ways to exploit our successes. Finally, we must find a way to address the spread of violent extremism through the Internet.

16. (S/NF) Available resources should be targeted and applied where the threat is greatest and where there is a high likelihood of success. However, funding for additional programs and missions' human resource constraints to support them remains a significant problem in the region. In many countries, missions' funding and staff limitations have prevented the execution of CT programs. While there are many pots of funds, it is often unclear to posts what is available for what kinds of programs. The USG also lacks short-term flexibility to respond to emerging threats and needs to develop a fast-track system to respond to changing circumstances.

17. (S/NF) At the same time, we must expand cooperation with international partners and sub-regional organizations, in order to avoid duplication and strengthen our own efforts. France in particular is very active in the region and has been increasingly receptive to cooperation with the US. We can also exploit existing links between host governments and USG entities to expand programs and circumvent government suspicion. Ultimately, the capacity of the host country to

absorb assistance should be the only limitation to our CT efforts.

Where are we Going?

18. (S/NF) While TSCTP and RSI have been successful, we must continue to refine the process to advance our CT efforts. We need a greater focus on RSI and TSCTP coordination. To this end, the group identified a number of future steps that are necessary, which include big picture challenges, short term action items, and intelligence needs:

BIG PICTURE CHALLENGES:

- Establish "how-to" plan for regional cooperation
- Create fast-track system to fund and approve new programs
- Exploit terrorists' financial constraints
- Develop programs to combat Internet extremism
- Identify public diplomacy campaign for region, as well as individual country plans

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- Engage Government of Mali on incorporating Tuaregs into security efforts

SHORTER TERM "DUE-OUTS"

- Ensure future RSI conferences precede working-level TSCTP conferences and put greater emphasis on coordination between the two
- Update list of existing programs in TSCTP region
- Outline available funding sources and application processes
- Establish TSCTP Law Enforcement Working Group
- Deepen cooperation with France on regional CT issues
- Brief Government of Algeria on US cooperation with Mali
- Demarche Government of Austria not to pay hostage ransom
- Draft regional Section 1210 proposal(s)

INTELLIGENCE NEEDS:

- Insight on whether AQIM and the Tuaregs develop ties beyond existing commercial relationships
- Means to track and counter trans-national terror groups' use of Internet
- Product on narcotrafficking-terrorism link

19. (SBU) Finally, the group tentatively agreed that the next RSI Trans Sahara conference will be held on the margins of the AF Chiefs of Mission conference, currently planned for early October in Washington. The session should begin with an overview of action taken on the above deliverables.

PARTICIPANTS

110. (SBU) The following officials attended the conference:

Posts:

Algiers: Ambassador Robert Ford

Chad: Ambassador Louis Nigro
Libya: Charge Chris Stevens
Mali: Ambassador Terence McCulley
Mauritania: Ambassador Marc Boulware and MAJ Charles Collins
Morocco: Ambassador Thomas Riley
Niger: DCM Don Koran
Tunisia: Ambassador Robert Godec, COL Warren Gunderman,
Charles Broome, Susannah Cooper

State:

S/CT: Ambassador-at-Large Dell Dailey and Victor Nelson
AF: PDAS Linda Thomas-Greenfield
DS: Marc Hunter
NEA: DAS Gordon Gray and Margaret Nardi
R: Adnan Kifayat

Interagency:

AFRICOM: Jerry Lanier
DOJ: Jennifer Smith
NCTC: Tim Andrews and Allyson Scotti

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NSC: Elizabeth Farr
OSD: Dr. Kalev Sepp and LTC Roy Douglas
SOC Africa: BG Patrick Higgins
SOCOM: MG David Scott and CAPT Aaron Treherne
USAID: Elizabeth Kvitashvili and Henderson Patrick

11. (SBU) This cable has been cleared by S/CT, NEA, AF and participating missions.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/tunis/index.cfm>
GODEC